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SUBJECT: DECIDEDLY MIXED REACTION FROM POLITICIANS TO
AUGUST ELECTION

REF: A. KABUL 217
[1](#)B. KABUL 181

[1](#)1. (SBU) SUMMARY. Members of Parliament, political leaders, and other political observers had a mixed reaction to the Independent Election Commission's (IEC) announcement of August 20 for presidential and provincial council elections (ref A). IEC arguments that an earlier date would not allow sufficient time to stabilize the security situation and mobilize efforts for an open and transparent election appear to have swayed many earlier opponents. Lower House Speaker Yunus Qanooni and most of his United Front allies have decided not to contest the IEC's authority to set a later date, despite earlier threats to dispute the legitimacy of any election held after May. Some MPs will continue to protest the IEC's decision, but lack the political clout to mount a serious challenge.

[1](#)2. (SBU) With the resolution of the date debate, Qanooni and other Karzai opponents will now focus efforts on challenging the legality of Karzai remaining in office after May 22, the day on which the Constitution suggests the presidential term ends. Qanooni is pushing for Karzai to step aside in favor of a transitional government. If his effort gains momentum it could pose a threat to continuity of government and introduce political ambiguity in the lead up to elections and at the height of the fighting season. We will report on this issue and potential resolutions septel.

Emerging Political Consensus in Support of IEC Announcement

[1](#)3. (SBU) Members of Parliament, especially in the Lower House where Karzai is extremely unpopular, had opposed the IEC's efforts to set an election date after the spring timeframe outlined in the Constitution. The IEC's security-based arguments convinced many MPs to accept a later election date. Other opposition members, led by Qanooni, decided it was no longer politically advantageous to fan the debate. Lower House Deputy Speaker Mirwais Yaseni (Nangarhar, Pashtun) expressed reservations that the Constitution was again being bent to accommodate political realities, but admitted there was no better alternative. Influential MPs Haji Mohammed Mohaqqueq (Kabul, Hazara) and Abdul Rassoul Sayyaf (Kabul, Pashtun) supported the IEC's decision.

[1](#)4. (SBU) Poloffs spoke with a group of women MPs soon after the IEC's January 29 announcement on the August election date. All eight -- representing a regional and ethnic cross-section of Afghanistan -- supported the date. Rahima Jamay (Herat, Tajik) said August would let more women register to vote. Nasima Niazi (Helmand, Pashtun) hoped

security in her province would improve by the fall. A spring election would have seen many Helmand residents unable or unwilling to go to the polls amid threats from the Taliban. In a separate conversation, MP Haji Ali Mohammad (Logar, Pashtun) said August gives security forces an opportunity to stabilize restive districts in his province before the election.

¶5. (SBU) Abdul Jabbar Naeemi, a former governor of Wardak province, agreed the delay was the only "practical" solution. More time was needed for logistics planning and to wrap up voter registration efforts. Although he supported Karzai's re-election, Naeemi pointed out the extra months would give opposition candidates more time to campaign and reduce the chances they would cry foul over an abbreviated campaign season.

Civil Society Groups React Favorably

¶6. (SBU) The Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) had taken an official position that the election should take place in March or April. However, AIHRC Commissioner Nader Naderi said AIHRC recognized security conditions precluded holding a fair and free election in the constitutionally mandated timeframe.

¶7. (SBU) Laila Langari of the Afghan Women's Network welcomed the IEC announcement, saying current security conditions in the south would prevent most women from voting. An August election would allow more time to secure voting places and give civil society groups greater opportunity to raise public

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awareness. She predicted, however, that fewer people would participate in this election than in the 2004 presidential election because they were less hopeful and security conditions were worse.

¶8. (SBU) Foundation for Culture and Civil Society Director Timor Hakimyar echoed many of Langari's points, saying the additional time would give government and Coalition Forces more time to improve security, expanding Afghan participation. He suggested civil society groups could increase public awareness through advertising and educational workshops.

Some Holdouts Remain

¶9. (SBU) Several Lower House MPs spoke out against the IEC's decision in Parliament and to the media. MP Fazal Karim Aimaq (Kunduz, Tajik) said the IEC had violated the Constitution by moving the date past the spring. MPs Kabir Ranjbar (Kabul, Pashtun), Shukria Barakzai (Kabul, Pashtun), and Fawzia Koofi (Badakhshan, Tajik) agreed and said they would seek legal means to block the IEC's decision. Those criticizing the new election date, however, did so as individuals and did not present a unified plan to challenge the IEC. Without the backing of Qanooni or other United Front leaders, these MPs will likely be unable to organize an effective opposition or push their complaints through a judicial system that has been reluctant to weigh in on constitutional matters.

¶10. (SBU) Most independent daily newspapers reported negatively on the IEC decision. Arman-e-Milli (circulation: 4,600) said the IEC was a tool of Karzai's. The normally pro-government Erada Daily (circulation: 3,000) said the government's failure to provide security over the last seven years did not bode well for efforts to improve security over the next few months. Nevertheless, like most MPs who oppose the August date, the newspapers provided no credible alternative nor disputed the IEC's point that a spring election would lead to lower turnout.

WOOD